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FAA reauthorization bill passes with riders for disaster policy reform, Hurricane Florence funding, and geospatial data

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President Donald Trump signed a long-sought reauthorization for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) into law on October 5, which included a major set of reforms to address the rising costs of natural disasters in the U.S. and help communities improve their pre-disaster mitigation and recovery practices.

The president's signature concludes nearly two years of drawn-out consideration and amendment of the bill in both chambers of Congress. "This is something we've been trying to do for many years," said Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK), noting that a five-year bill had not been passed since the 1980s. "It's really a big, major deal."

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 ([H.R. 302](#)), introduced by Representative Brett Guthrie (R-KY-2), extends funding for the agency for five years and includes provisions intended to improve aircraft safety and benefit passengers, such as creating minimum legroom requirements on commercial flights. The comprehensive legislation also contained several other provisions related to disaster recovery reform, supplemental appropriations for disaster relief, and geospatial data.

Included as part of the five-year FAA reauthorization, the [Disaster Recovery Reform Act](#) (DRRA) changes the nation's approach to disaster spending by investing in infrastructure and increasing federal emphasis on proactive pre-disaster planning and mitigation. This legislation was originally [introduced](#) as a standalone bill in the House by Representative Lou Barletta (R-PA-11), who is chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's subcommittee overseeing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Language from the DRRA was added to the FAA reauthorization bill by the Senate last month, along with other amendments.

According to a [joint op-ed](#) by Representative Barletta and former FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison published in *The Hill* last month, the DRRA will help accomplish the goal of building a more resilient America and increase the amount of money available to arm communities "with the necessary resources to strengthen their infrastructure against hurricanes and other disasters." The DRRA, in part, increases federal investment in pre-disaster mitigation, increases reimbursement caps for state and local governments on a range of disaster costs, and allows state and local governments to administer housing assistance grants. The FAA reauthorization bill also includes supplemental funding to support recovery efforts for victims of Hurricane Florence. Specifically, it provides \$1.68 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Fund for long-term disaster recovery.

In addition to federal disaster policy reforms and disaster aid funding, the FAA Reauthorization Act contains the Geospatial Data Act, a bill to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and increase data transparency in the acquisition of geospatial data.

Geospatial data—information that has a geographic component to it—can be used for a variety of applications such as plotting a path for a new interstate highway or coordinating recovery efforts after a major disaster.

The Geospatial Data Act was originally introduced in both chambers of Congress in November 2017—sponsored by Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AR-4) in the House as [H.R. 4395](#) and by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) in the Senate as [S. 2128](#). According to a [press release](#) from Representative Westerman's office, the Geospatial Data Act is supported by several national geoscience associations and private companies such as the American Association of Geographers, Cartography and Geographic Information Society, Google, and Tesla. Language from the Geospatial Data Act was incorporated into the FAA Reauthorization Act in September before the bill's final passage.

Sources: The Hill; Library of Congress; U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Lou Barletta; U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Bruce Westerman.
